How to / Trackmania / User appearance / Avatars

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Part 4 : File types, resolution & size

These are the specifications for Avatars. For getting best possible conversion results, you should use the tools mentioned in the Graphic formats tutorial, especially XnView, DDS Converter and Rad Game Tools.

Valid Image types for Trackmania avatars:
JPG, **DDS** and **BIK**

Valid Image dimensions for Trackmania avatars:

For **JPG**: anything up to 256*256...
For **DDS**: X/Y dimensions must be any of 2^n ... 2^4=**16**, 2^5=**32**, 2^6=**64** , 2^7=**128**, 2^8=**256**, just like DDS files always work...
Valid avatar dimensions would be e.g. 16*16, 32*32, 64*64, 128*128 and 256*256.
For **BIK** animtions: It's highly recommended you use the same dimensions as for DDS files, this will support compressability a lot.

Valid Image file sizes for Trackmania avatars:

Below 50kb
That's for single avatar images/animations and for the combined emoticon avatars before beeing zipped.

Tips for conversion/compression:

In the Graphic formats tutorial you've learned how to convert & compress the different types of files successfully.
When converting your graphics (e.g. the BMP from Part 3 of this tutorial), keep in mind that only **DDS** and **BIK** will have **transparent areas** in the picture/animation, while **JPG** is good for small **file sizes**...

DDS compression for Avatars

If your paint program **can't handle DDS** files properly, first save your image to either **TGA** or **PNG** format first (these 2 formats can also store transparency / alpha information). After that, use the "DDS Converter" tool to convert it to DDS.

DXT1A : This compression uses a 1bit alpha value for every pixel, which means: Every single pixel in your image is either 0=invisible or 1=visible. There is no in-between.

DXT5 : Alpha/Transparency values are represented by 8 bits .. which means that there are 256 shades from visible to invisible. Takes more space for compression but can create very nice transitions. The overall texture quality is also better.

ATTENTION!

A rather absurd "bug" has been reported from within Trackmania. If YOUR graphic settings use low texture quality, it's possibility that ALL OTHER people will only see a blurred avatar of yours if it was compressed with DXT5.
So after all ,we **recommend** you to compress your avatar pictures with **DXT1A** compression.

After converting your image, place it into the **folder for custom avatars**:
C:\Documents and Settings\(Your Name)\My Documents\TrackMania\Skins\Avatars\

If all is well, then it will be listed alphabetically in the game after clicking on the avatar picture in the Profile menu. In some cases you have to restart the game to make the avatar show up in the listing
W'ndows Vista users please refer to the new File Locations tutorial for the right folder.

Part 5 : Advanced "Transparency"

Avatars that don't seem to have a border or are transparent are very good looking. This effect can be achieved by adding alpha channel information (transparency) to a picture.

Using Alpha channels / Transparency

Let us use the alpha channel to mask out the portions of the image we don't want to display and simultaneously make the background transparent.

The following examples uses Ad*be Photoshop to create an Alpha channel.

However, The creation of **Alpha channels / Transparency** areas differs a lot from program to program. We suggest you go look for a specific tutorial for your paint program.

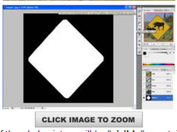
Starting with the Moose picture...

Select the part we want to keep using a **point to point selection** or some other method.

Create a new channel (alpha).

When it is created the new channel will look black, which means = everything is still invisible.

Then I make sure the only channel I am editing is this **new channel (Alpha 1)** and delete my selection it will look like the picture on the right...



CLICK IMAGE TO ZOOM

What we have achieved so far: The **Alpha channel decides** what parts of the whole picture will be "**visible**" or not. The black part will be invisible, but the part (our selection) we deleted out of this blackness will be fully visible.

Save it / Convert to DDS
Look at Part 4 of this tutorial for DDS storage specifications.

Part 6 : Advanced "Animated avatars"

Animated avatars are supported by Trackmania. Try an Internet search for "*animated avatars*", thousand of websites will pop up.
You will find there is no shortage of content out there to personalize your profile, most of the animations will be in .GIF format...

Converting an existing animation

to a Trackmania .**BIK** file is explained in the **Graphic formats tutorial, part 7**. For avatars, your animation/BIK can also contain transparent areas.

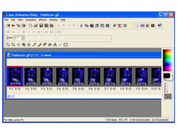
Don't forget that your **BIK** file has to mee tthe **specifications** of **part 4 of this tutorial**.

Manipulating animations / creating your own animations

There are a number of animation software packages capable of capturing video/animation sequences from different sources to your hard disk. That could be a DVD playing software, a video rendering software or whatever...

Basically you can use any video/animation footage (stored in a somewhat common file format) and load it into a software that is made to **manipulate these animations**.

Jasc Software has made Animation Shop 3 freely available via their ftp web site.
http://ftp.jasc.com/pub/en/ani311en.exe



With this software you can load existing animations and edit them to your needs. Experiment and have fun. Try opening animated GIFs and playing with them to get the hang of the process.
The best animated avatars are the ones with seamless transitions when beeing played back in a loop.

Part 7 : Advanced "Emoticons"

These are avatars that can **change** with the use of chat commands. These avatars can be made of either static **DDS** files or animated **BIK** files.

Emoticon avatars are stored in **ZIP** files, and be **DDS** or **BIK** files.

Your avatar ZIP file contains:
happy.dds / **normal.dds** / **sad.dds**
or
happy.bik / **normal.bik** / **sad.bik**

The **maximum size** of the zipped file still stands at **50kb**.

For best results the DDS or BIK files used should total **under 50k before zipping**. If the total is greater than 50k and after zipping is under 50k the game will try to use it and it is a good bet that a red/black checkerboard will be the resultant image, so you must experiment around a bit with the file sizes before/after archiving them into the ZIP.

Examples of useage

happy.bik will be displayed
→ when characters are entered in the chat :) :-) ;-) ;) :D :-D ^_^ ^^ ^o^
→ when a driver advances his position or finishes a track for the first time in a round.
normal.bik will be displayed
→ when unspecial chat messages are entered.
→ in the list after each round of playing
→ when someone looks at the userlist with the TAB key
sad.bik will be displayed
→ when characters are entered in the chat :(:-(:'(>_<
→ when a player retires in rounds mode.

That should be sufficient to give you a good overview how to use avatars in Trackmania.

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